

Assessment report
NVAO Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Research Master Urban Studies

University of Amsterdam

Contents of the report

1. Executive summary	2
2. Programme administrative information.....	5
3. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard	6
3.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	6
3.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	9
3.3 Standard 3: Student assessment.....	12
3.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes.....	14
4. Overview of assessments	16
5. Recommendations	17
Appendix: Assessment process	18

1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Research Master Urban Studies of the University of Amsterdam. The programme was assessed according to the four standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands.

The programme is well-organised and is embedded firmly in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Amsterdam.

The profile of the programme meets the requirements for research master programmes in the urban studies field of study. The panel appreciates the multidisciplinary, comparative and multimethod character of the programme and welcomes students being given the opportunities to pursue different paths within this field of study.

The programme intended learning outcomes conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories.

The argumentation for the English programme name and English as the language of instruction is sound, as English allows the programme to cater to international students and allows students to take part in the curriculum components abroad.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the recommendations of the previous assessment panel.

The number of incoming students in the programme allows for appropriate class sizes and assures the educational viability of the programme. The entry requirements and admission procedures of the programme assure admitting students who have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel approves of the curriculum contents and coherence. The curriculum reflects the multidisciplinary character, the comparative approach, and the methodological plurality of the programme. The Global South and Global North are covered in the substantive courses. The methodology training and the methods courses in qualitative, quantitative, geographical information systems (GIS) and mixed research methods are up to standard. Research ethics are covered. On some aspects of the curriculum, the panel thinks improvements may be made. The panel recommends to align the methods courses better and to design logical pathways for students to gain depth in the methods. The panel also recommends to require students to do extra challenging assignments when taking regular master courses and to have the Examinations Board monitor this, and to ascertain the electives abroad being aligned with the programme intended learning outcomes and meeting the research master level.

The lecturers in the programme have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. All research programme groups which the lecturers are involved in, show very good to excellent results in recent research assessments. The programme is embedded in high-quality research activities. As the workload among lecturers is high, the panel recommends to monitor this workload.

The programme educational concept, study methods and study guidance in the programme are up to standard. The panel recommends to pay attention to and to monitor the study load and study stress among students. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are appropriate.

Programme management took adequate measures in the Covid crisis to provide for and to assure the quality of education as well as of examinations and assessments, and to monitor the well-being of students.

The rules and regulations for the examinations and assessments in the programme are appropriate. The quality assurance of these is up to standard. The activities of the Examinations Board are adequate as well. The panel advises, nevertheless, programme management to follow up more transparently on the rules, regulations and propositions brought forward by the Examinations Board.

The examination methods in the courses are in line with the knowledge and skills to be tested in these courses. The examination methods are satisfactorily varied. The panel is positive about the fraud and plagiarism rules.

The supervision and assessment processes for the thesis are up to standard. The panel advises, nevertheless, to document the separate assessments of the thesis examiners, to have the thesis examiners give more extensive feedback to substantiate the marks, especially the higher marks, and to have the examiners comment on the plagiarism score.

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of programme graduates of the last two complete years. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Out of all theses reviewed, eight were graded satisfactory, four theses were found to be good and three theses were found to be excellent. The grades for eight theses were found to be appropriate. The grades for five theses (1/3 of all theses) were found to be too high, but less than one point. One thesis was found to be graded more than one point too high. The panel considers this last thesis to be an outlier. One thesis was found to be graded too low, but less than one point too low.

The panel sees the proportion of students graduating cum laude as being rather high. The panel recommends to make the cum laude requirements more demanding.

Although the panel appreciates the career preparation in the *Urban Studies in Practice* course, the panel advises to schedule career guidance activities earlier in the programme as well.

As programme management does not keep track of how many graduates find research positions in non-academic organisations, the panel advises to document the proportion of graduates obtaining non-academic research positions.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Research Master Urban Studies of the University of Amsterdam assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be positive. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to continue the accreditation of this programme.

Rotterdam, 16 June 2021,

Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD
(panel chair)

W. Vercouteren MSc
(panel secretary)

2. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: Master Urban Studies (Research)
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master
Grade: MSc
Number of credits: 120 EC
Specialisations: N.A.
Location: Amsterdam
Mode of study: Full-time
Language of instruction: English
Registration in CROHO: 21PK-60217

Name of institution: University of Amsterdam
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

3. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

3.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

The Research Master Urban Studies programme is one of the master programmes in social sciences of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Amsterdam. The programme carries 120 EC of study load and takes two years to complete. The programme is part of the Graduate School of Social Sciences. The Graduate School bundles the master programmes, research master programmes and PhD trajectories in the domain of social sciences of the Faculty. The Graduate School director chairs the Board of Studies, on which sit all programme directors as well as two student members. The Board of Studies is responsible for the educational and financial policies of the programmes. Management of this programme is in the hands of the programme director, who is assisted by the programme coordinator/study adviser. The Programme Committee, consisting of lecturers and students, advises programme management on the quality of the programme. The Examinations Board sets rules for examinations and assessments in the programme and monitors the quality of these. Most lecturers in the programme are employed at the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies. Lecturers are researchers, participating in the research programme groups Urban Geographies, Geographies of Globalisations, Urban Planning or Political Sociology of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR).

The profile of the programme is to train students to acquire knowledge and skills about cities and their development and to study urban change and the opportunities and challenges this produces. The programme is multidisciplinary, studying these themes and subjects from the perspectives of the disciplines urban geography, economic geography, urban and regional planning, and urban sociology. The programme takes a comparative approach, studying themes and subjects from an internationally comparative perspective. The programme offers methodological plurality, giving students the chance to specialise in qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods or geographical information systems (GIS) research methods. The programme has no specialisations.

The programme's intended learning outcomes include theoretical and methodological knowledge and understanding in the field of the urban studies, knowledge and skills to do independent research in this field, identifying critical urban issues, formulating research questions and making research designs to address these issues, communication skills, and skills to contribute to the field of urban studies in research and policy positions.

Programme management showed the intended learning outcomes to correspond to the Dublin descriptors for the second cycle, as indicators of the master level. The intended learning outcomes

partly reach the Dublin descriptors for the third cycle, as this research master programme aims to prepare students for PhD positions.

Programme management made the comparison to other programmes in this field in the Netherlands and abroad. Notwithstanding clear similarities to these programmes, the Amsterdam programme distinguishes itself, among other things, through the comparative approach and the large part of the programme being spent abroad.

The programme name is English, and the programme is taught in English. The English name and English as language of instruction are chosen to allow international students to enrol. English proficiency is also a requirement on the grounds that it enables students to take part in the international components of the curriculum, such as the comparative case study abroad and the electives abroad. Furthermore, the programme is linked to English-spoken research programme groups. Also, English allows to recruit international teachers, making expertise available to the programme.

Programme management took up the recommendations of the previous assessment panel, leading to a number of improvements. The course *Urban Studies in Practice* was introduced to prepare students for non-academic careers, students are better informed about the relevance of quantitative methods, the number of partner universities has been increased to allow students to spend the comparative case study abroad in countries in the Global South, and instructions were given to examiners to completely fill out the master thesis assessment form.

Considerations

The panel sees the programme organisation as adequate and considers the programme to be well-embedded in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Amsterdam.

The panel regards the profile of the programme to meet the requirements for research master programmes in the urban studies domain, urban studies being an object-based study. The panel appreciates the multidisciplinary, international comparative and multimethod character of the programme and welcomes students being given the opportunities provided for them to pursue their own substantive research interests within the parameters of the programme.

The programme intended learning outcomes meet research master requirements. These intended learning outcomes, so the panel established, conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories.

The panel appreciates the comparison of this programme to similar programmes in the Netherlands and abroad, observing the commonalities and differences of these programmes and the distinctive character of this programme.

The panel endorses the English programme name and English as the language of instruction. Among other things, English allows the programme to cater to international students and allows students to take part in curriculum components abroad.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the recommendations of the previous assessment panel.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 1, Intended learning outcomes.

3.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

The number of students enrolling in the programme is on average 19 students per year over the last six years, ranging from 15 to 24 students each year. The intake was extraordinarily high at 35 students in 2020, which may have been due to Covid effects. Approximately 50 % of the students are Dutch, and another 50 % come from other European countries. The gender balance is largely in favour of female students, being about 2/3 of all students.

The programme entry requirements are either academic bachelor degrees in social sciences or in related disciplines, with at least 20 EC of training in social sciences research methods. Applicants ought to have experience in the urban studies field, have to report the grade point average of at least 7.5 (Dutch grading system) in their prior education and have to be proficient in English. The admissions committee admits applicants on the basis of these criteria. Applicants with deficiencies in social sciences research methods may be admitted after having taken a research methodology and design course.

The curriculum consists of two years. In the first year, courses are offered. This year includes two compulsory substantive or theoretical courses and one substantive elective course (together 24 EC). The elective (6 EC) is shared with students of regular, one-year master programmes. The first year also comprises one methodology course (6 EC), one compulsory research methods course on comparative research (6 EC), and two methods elective courses (12 EC). The electives are taken jointly by students of this research master programme and the other two research master programmes of the Graduate School, Social Sciences and International Development Studies. Also in the first year, students participate in a research project of one of the four research programme groups, linked to the programme (9 EC) and draft the research proposal (3 EC) in preparation of their second-year research project. In the research proposal course, research ethics are addressed. The individual research project (36 EC) takes the major part of the second year. This project consists of three parts, the comparative case study abroad (12 EC), the comparative case study in the Netherlands (12 EC) and the thesis or journal article (12 EC). In the thesis or journal article, students are required to make the comparison between the two cases they studied, showing to be able to do research-based international comparisons in the programme domain. The comparative case study abroad is conducted mostly in places in the Global North, but students also go to cities in the Global South. While being abroad to do the comparative case study abroad, students take theoretical or methods electives at the host institution (18 EC). At the end of the second year, students take the course *Thesis Seminar* (3 EC) to train scientific writing and reporting skills and the course *Urban Studies in Practice* to train transferable skills relevant for the labour market. The last few years, improvements in the contents and scheduling of the curriculum were implemented. Programme management demonstrated the curriculum to meet the programme intended learning outcomes.

The staff lecturing in the programme comprises 36 lecturers, amounting to 1.5 FTE, with 13 of them being core staff in the programme. All lecturers have PhDs and 94 % of them have acquired the University Teaching Qualification certificate. The lecturers have different disciplinary backgrounds. They are internationally qualified researchers in their field of study and publish in peer-reviewed journals. The research programme groups of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), in which lecturers participate as researchers, obtained for each of the assessment criteria the scores *very good* or *excellent* in the most recent research assessments in 2014 and 2020. Lecturers take part in the Centre for Urban Studies, one of the interdisciplinary research centres of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University. Lecturers bring forward their research interests in the courses. Staff members experience high workload.

The educational concept of the programme is research-based education. The study methods in the programme include lectures, seminars, student presentations, and in-class discussions. Class sizes are small, seminars not exceeding 25 students. The number of contact hours range between 8 and 12 hours per week in the first year. In the second year, students are individually supervised by lecturers. Students meet regularly with the thesis supervisor and may turn to the study adviser for additional assistance. Two times per year, students of both years meet with programme management to discuss any issues in the programme. Students regard the overall study load of the programme as challenging. The proportion of students dropping out of the programme decreased over the last years to on average 12 %. The Graduate School of Social Sciences has set the study success rate for completion of the programme within three years at 80 %. The programme study success rate was lower before, but rose to on average 88 % for the last two cohorts.

Programme management has taken measures to organise education in the Covid crisis and to monitor the quality of the education. Education on campus often proves not to be feasible, mainly due to government regulations. Therefore, learning activities have been changed to online lectures and seminars. Programme management also offers alternatives for data collection abroad, by allowing students to use secondary data sets. Electives abroad were changed to University of Amsterdam courses, with Examinations Board approval. These alternative learning activities are assured to meet course goals and programme intended learning outcomes. In student surveys, questions on the quality of online education have been added. Response rates tend to be lower to some extent and results are mixed. Students indicate to appreciate the efforts to offer online education or they suggest improvements. The study adviser regularly contacts students, and organises meetings with them. This way, students' well-being is actively being monitored. The study adviser also assists students in overcoming obstacles in their studies. Thesis supervisors signal students' problems. Lecturers are requested to intensify their contacts with students, and to prioritise education over research.

Considerations

The number of incoming students in the programme allows for appropriate class sizes and assures the educational viability of the programme.

The panel approves of the entry requirements and admission procedures of the programme. These assure admitting students, who have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets, so the panel established, the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel approves of the curriculum contents and coherence. The curriculum reflects the multidisciplinary character, the internationally comparative approach, and the methodological plurality of the programme. The Global South and Global North are covered in the substantive courses. The panel appreciates the methodology training. Research ethics are covered. On some aspects of the curriculum, the panel thinks improvements may be made. The panel finds the courses in qualitative, quantitative, geographical information systems (GIS) and mixed research methods to be up to standard, but recommends to align these better and to design logical pathways for students to gain depth in these methods. The courses concerned are the two methods electives and the *Urban Lab* course. The panel advises to require students of this research master programme to do extra challenging assignments when taking regular master courses and to have the Examinations Board monitor this. In addition, the panel recommends to ascertain the electives abroad being aligned with the programme intended learning outcomes and meeting the research master level.

The panel is positive about the staff teaching in the programme. The lecturers have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. The research programme groups which the lecturers are involved in, all show very good to excellent results in recent research assessments. The panel, therefore, finds the programme to be embedded in high-quality research activities. The panel recommends to manage the workload of lecturers.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods as appropriate for this programme. The study guidance in the programme is up to standard. The panel recommends to pay attention to and manage the study load and study stress among students. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are appropriate.

As the panel observed, programme management took measures to provide adequate education during the Covid crisis, to assure the quality of this education, and to monitor the well-being of students.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 2, Teaching-learning environment.

3.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.
--

Findings

The examination and assessment rules and regulations for the programme are specified in the Teaching and Examination Regulations and in the Rules and Guidelines of the Examinations Board.

The Examinations Board is responsible for, among other things, monitoring the quality of examinations and assessments, appointing examiners, and assuring students meeting the programme intended learning outcomes. The Examinations Board has these responsibilities for this programme, the Research Master Social Sciences and International Development Studies programmes, and the regular, one-year Master International Development Studies programme. External members sit on the Board. Each year, the Board reviews two to three courses on the alignment of intended learning outcomes, course goals and assignments or examinations. The Board also reviews a number of theses with lower, average and higher grades.

The assessment methods in the programme include written examinations, in-class participation, written assignments, and group and individual presentations. The fraud and plagiarism rules of the University of Amsterdam apply to all summative examinations and graded assignments. All of the graded written assignments are checked for plagiarism by dedicated software.

Students completing the individual research project are guided in this process by the individual thesis supervisor. During the fieldwork abroad, students remain in periodic contact with their University of Amsterdam supervisors, but are also offered some resources to enlist local supervisory advice, typically from a member of staff of the host institution. Before being allowed to start this process, students have to pass the *Urban Lab: Research Proposal* course and have to obtain approval of their research proposal. Students are required to submit the thesis at the official deadline or they may make use of the second deadline which is considered a rewrite. Submitting at the second deadline excludes the student graduating cum laude. The master theses are assessed and graded by the supervisor and the second reader. They give their mark after the oral defence by the student. When the supervisor and the second reader disagree on the thesis mark or when they decide to grade the thesis a marginal pass or fail (between 5.0 and 6.0), a third reader is appointed to independently grade the thesis.

Programme management has taken measures to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid crisis and to monitor their quality. Written assignments, reports, and presentations have been organised as in pre-Covid times, be it that presentations are given online. The proportion of on-site written examinations in the programme is very limited. So, changes in the organisation and scheduling of examinations and assessment remain very limited as well. Proctoring has not been adopted. To lower stress levels of students, the Examinations Board is more lenient, extends deadlines for theses and changes some examinations to pass/fail. The Examinations Board monitors

the quality of examinations and assessments and assures these to meet the programme intended learning outcomes.

Considerations

The panel regards the rules and regulations for the programme examinations and assessments to be appropriate. The quality assurance of the examinations and assessments is adequate.

The panel sees the activities of the Examinations Board as being appropriate. The panel advises, nevertheless, programme management to follow up more transparently on the rules, regulations and propositions brought forward by the Examinations Board.

The examination methods in the courses are appropriate for the knowledge and skills to be tested in these courses. The examination methods are satisfactorily varied. The panel is positive about the fraud and plagiarism rules.

The panel regards the supervision and assessment processes for the thesis to be up to standard and approves of the thesis assessment form in use. From these forms, it is, however, unclear what the independent judgements of each of the examiners is, as only the joint assessment is presented. The panel advises to document the separate assessments. The panel also regards the comments by the thesis examiners to be rather concise and often not elaborate enough. The panel recommends to have the thesis examiners give more extensive feedback to substantiate the marks, especially the higher marks. In addition, the panel advises for the examiners to comment on the plagiarism score, listed on the thesis assessment form.

The panel considers the measures programme management has taken to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid-crisis and to monitor the quality of these examinations and assessments to be appropriate.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 3, Student assessment.

3.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.
--

Findings

Students are to demonstrate the knowledge and skills, they have acquired in the programme, in the thesis. Theses may take the form of either thesis or article. Most students opt for the thesis.

The average grade for the theses ranged from 7.6 to 7.8 for the last three cohorts. The Examinations Board for the programme, who reviewed a number of theses, found the marks of the thesis examiners in a number of cases somewhat too high but not substantially too high. Over the last five years, 11 graduates from the programme (about 1/10 of all graduates) managed to have their master thesis published in peer-reviewed journals. Other theses are published in non-refereed journals or in edited volumes.

The proportion of students graduating cum laude, was 24 % for the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 cohorts and 36 % for the 2019/2020 cohort.

The course *Urban Studies in Practice* in the second year gives students the opportunity to train transferable skills, such as communication skills and networking skills, relevant for both the academic and non-academic labour market and to obtain information on non-academic careers. This course allows students to meet with alumni from the programme. The Graduate School of Social Sciences schedules a career event for students yearly. The event allows students to get into contact with prospective employers.

The proportion of graduates from the programme proceeding to PhD trajectories is about 23 %. The number of PhD positions offered by the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) has decreased, due to funding issues. Increasing numbers of graduates pursue PhD trajectories at other institutions. Programme graduates also find research or policy positions outside of academia. Programme management does not distinguish between non-academic research positions and policy positions.

Considerations

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of programme graduates. The theses were selected from all of the theses of graduates of the last two years. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher marks were represented. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Out of all theses reviewed, eight were graded satisfactory, four theses were found to be good and three theses were found to be excellent. The grades for eight theses were found to be appropriate. The grades for five theses (1/3 of all theses) were found to be too high, but less than one point. One thesis was found to be graded more than one point too high. The panel considers this last thesis to be an outlier. One thesis was found to be graded too low, but less than one point too low.

The panel sees the proportion of students graduating cum laude as being rather high. The panel recommends to make the cum laude requirements more demanding.

Although the panel appreciates the career preparation in the *Urban Studies in Practice* course, the panel advises to schedule career guidance activities earlier in the programme as well.

As programme management does not keep track of how many graduates find research positions in non-academic organisations, the panel advises to document the proportion of graduates obtaining non-academic research positions.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes.

4. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 1
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Programme meets Standard 2
Standard 3: Student assessment	Programme meets Standard 3
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 4
Programme	Positive

5. Recommendations

In this report, a number of recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below.

- To align the methods courses better and to design logical pathways for students to gain depth in either of the methods.
- To require students of this research master programme to do extra challenging assignments when taking regular master courses and to have the Examinations Board monitor this.
- To ascertain the electives abroad being aligned with the programme intended learning outcomes and meeting the research master level.
- To manage the workload of lecturers.
- To pay attention to and to manage the study load and the study stress among students.
- To follow up more transparently on the rules, regulations and propositions brought forward by the Examinations Board.
- To document the separate assessments of the thesis examiners, to have the thesis examiners give more extensive feedback to substantiate the marks, and to have the examiners comment on the plagiarism score.
- To make the cum laude requirements more demanding.
- To schedule career guidance activities earlier in the programme as well.
- To document the proportion of graduates obtaining non-academic research positions.

Appendix: Assessment process

Certiked VBI evaluation agency was requested by the University of Amsterdam to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the Research Master Urban Studies of this University. The objective of the programme assessment of this research master programme was to establish whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, September, 2018 (officially published in Stcrt. 2019 no. 3198, 29 January 2019) as well as to the criteria listed in the NVAO Specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes, 30 May, 2016.

This programme is one of the programmes in the assessment cluster of Social Sciences Research Master programmes (in Dutch: WO OZM Maatschappij). Management of the programmes in this assessment cluster discussed the composition of the assessment panel and drafted the list of panel candidates.

Having conferred with programme management of the Research Master Urban Studies programme of the University of Amsterdam, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so.

The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD, Professor Emeritus of Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (panel chair);
- Prof. A. Need PhD, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy; Dean Twente Graduate School, University of Twente, the Netherlands (panel member)
- Prof. J.Y. Nazroo PhD, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, United Kingdom (panel member);
- N. Aerts BSc, student Research Master Social and Behavioural Sciences, Tilburg University, the Netherlands (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, W. Vercouteren MSc served as the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing being impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed as well as observing the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO has given its approval.

To prepare for the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with programme management to discuss the documents to be presented to the assessment panel, the site visit schedule, and the planning of the preparatory activities. In the course of this process, programme management and the Certiked process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process.

The activities prior to the site visit were performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of theses of programme graduates of the most recent years. These theses take the form of either theses/monographs or articles. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected fifteen theses from this list. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher grades were represented. Both theses/monographs and articles were part of the selection.

The panel members were forwarded in time the documents, prepared by programme management. These documents consisted of the self-evaluation report, the annexes to the self-evaluation report and additional information. The student chapter was part of the self-evaluation report. The annexes to the self-evaluation report included, among other things, a list of improvements after the previous accreditation, relations of intended learning outcomes to curriculum, course descriptions, teaching and examination regulations, core staff overview, recent publications and research grants of staff, data on student intake and success rates, list of students publications, and Covid-19 measures taken by programme management. The additional information consisted of, among other things, course dossiers and minutes and annual reports of Programme Committee and Examinations Board.

To assist panel members in assessing the programme, they were sent the Trained Eye Research Masters Limited Framework document of Certiked evaluation agency, this document being the elaboration of the NVAO Assessment framework and the NVAO Specification for research master programmes.

Prior to the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss the assessment process procedures. In this meeting, the panel chair was informed about the profile of panel chairs of NVAO. The panel chair agreed to work in line with the profile of panel chairs.

Seeing the continuing spread of Covid-infections in the Netherlands and the measures taken by Dutch government to counter the spread of infections, programme management proposed the site visit to be organised online. All panel members agreed to the online visit.

Prior to the date of the online visit, panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based upon their studying the programme documents, and sent in questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, and compiled a list of questions to serve as the starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the visit.

Shortly before the visit date, panel members met to prepare for the site visit. Panel members discussed the procedures to be adopted during the visit, the preliminary findings about the programme, the panel reviews of the final projects studied, and the questions to be put to the programme representatives.

On 31 March, 2021 and 1 April, 2021, the panel conducted the online visit. The visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. The visit schedule included the following meetings.

31 March, 2021

09.00 – 10.15 Faculty representatives, department head, research group director, programme director

10.30 – 11.30 Examinations Board

11.30 – 12.30 Panel lunch (closed session), with 11.30 – 12.00 Open office hours

1 April, 2021

12.45 – 13.30 Programme director, core lecturers, study adviser

13.45 – 14.30 Lecturers/final project examiners

14.45 – 15.30 Students, Programme Committee student member, and programme alumni

15.30 – 16.45 Deliberations panel (closed session)

16.45 – 17.00 Main findings presentation by panel chair to programme representatives

17.00 – 17.45 Development dialogue

Open office hours were communicated timely by programme management to staff and students. No persons presented themselves during these open office hours.

In a closed session at the end of the visit, the assessment panel considered the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. After these internal deliberations, the panel chair presented in broad outline the findings, considerations, conclusions and recommendations to programme representatives.

At the end of the site visit, panel members and programme management met to discuss further improvements in the programme during the development dialogue.

The assessment draft report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied this draft and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given two weeks to respond. Having been corrected for the factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the University Board to accompany their request to continue the accreditation of this programme.